

Light My Fire (come on, baby) by lavenderlow

Category: Stranger Things (TV 2016)

Genre: Angst/Comfort, Billy Hargrove Being Billy Hargrove, Billy Hargrove Is Bad at Feelings, Billy Hargrove Lives, But Also Repressing it, Enemies to Friends to Lovers, Everyone is Traumatized and Trying to Cope, Good Babysitter Steve Harrington, M/M, Slow Burn, Steve Harrington is Bi, Steve Harrington-centric, steve and robin ultimate best friends, steve is just trying to figure things out ok

Language: English

Characters: Billy Hargrove, Dustin Henderson, Eleven | Jane Hopper, Lucas Sinclair, Maxine "Max" Mayfield, Mike Wheeler, Robin Buckley, Steve Harrington

Relationships: Billy Hargrove/Steve Harrington

Status: In-Progress

Published: 2021-06-12

Updated: 2021-06-16

Packaged: 2022-03-31 14:23:39

Rating: Mature

Warnings: Creator Chose Not To Use Archive Warnings

Chapters: 2

Words: 8,082

Publisher: archiveofourown.org

Summary:

Steve Harrington admits that no one is the same after the incidents at Starcourt Mall — hell, he hasn't been the same since hitting the Demogorgon with a nailed bat in his ex-girlfriend's boyfriend's house.

Steve Harrington admits that maybe it's time that things change in Hawkins, for himself and for the sake of the people he loves.

But change is uncomfortable, and no one brings a bigger fucking challenge than Billy Hargrove.

1. chapter 1

Author's Note:

i have a few chapters of this story written but they've been sitting in my drafts for over a year..... but something about it has been calling me back. i've decided to post what i have and if this gets any attention i'll continue it :3 i swear this isn't all steve being depressed but he is definitely not the same in this post-s3. also billy lives. obv.

Steve wants to say it should be over now. Waking up in the middle of the night and being right back *there*, in the junkyard, hands clutching his bat. Some nights he swings and hits one of those stupid fucking dogs, some nights he hits two, but he always ends up in the same position. On the ground, blood pouring out of him, laying there. He's still alive and he can hear the kids screaming in the bus as he watches canine legs run over him, using his body as a welcome mat. He can't move. He can't scream. He can't save them.

Other nights the demodogs don't see him. They run right past him and he tries to swing, to do something, but the bats go straight through like they're *ghosts* and they run straight towards the bus and this time he's watching them tear apart the kids, defenseless. And he stands there, hyperventilating, clawing at his hair to make it *stop*, just for one night, just so he can sleep. He hasn't slept a full night in months.

He wants to say the nightmares should be over. It's been over a year since he was *actually* in the junkyard, successfully fighting off demodogs and saving Dustin's band of wayward sons.

Now the nightmares are different. He's back underground and he's strapped into a chair, Robin behind him, and he tries to shake them, to say her name, *something*. But she doesn't respond. He turns around and her head is lolled to the side, slack and lifeless. He turns around and feels his guts wrench. Feels stomach acid burning through his throat. She's dead and he can't get his fucking arms out from the bondage.

And he wakes up and finds his lights still on.

He looks to his alarm clock which reads in bright red numbers, 3:09. He managed to at least get three hours straight. He's done better, like last week when he slept a solid five hours in one sitting, but it was at Robin's house and on her couch because his Dad was yelling at him the same night, and he needed somewhere to go. Robin's house was safe. He found himself going there a lot nowadays, because her house doesn't have memories tied to it. No Nancy, no demodogs, no Upside-Down. But there were fleeting images of Russians floating through both of their brains.

He could stay in his bed and wait until the morning, when he has to go in for his shift. Or he can go downstairs. There's nothing for him to do down there, though. He knows that. Something in him is itching. He's felt this feeling before, like something's wrong, but it's never enough to put his finger on it. It's in the pit of his stomach, like an itch, but it's not an itch because itches sting, and this doesn't sting. It aches, and it tugs, makes him want to fall onto the floor and curl up into a ball and keep getting smaller and smaller until he feels like no one can see him. But he knows he will never be able to do that.

He drags himself out of his bed. It doesn't take him long to trudge down the stairs, holding the railing all the way down, swinging off on the last step. Maybe, yeah, he was screaming in his sleep ten minutes ago, judging by how sore his throat felt, but now he felt light. It's that kind of lightness that follows right after the tugging in his stomach, makes his brain feel foggy like he just smoked a joint. He was staring into his kitchen like his body didn't exist, he was just... *seeing*.

He's felt so different since it all. He knows he's not King Steve anymore, he *knows* that, every time he looks in the mirror and he sees his hair not pampered like it used to be, his moustache growing in more than he used to let it -- he's not the star of the basketball team anymore. Hell, he isn't even in school, because he flunked his college acceptance test because one of the questions made him think of that *night*, and he spent the rest of the test having a panic attack. King Steve didn't even know what the fuck a panic attack was.

He opens the fridge and grabs a bottle of water, chugs half of it, then slams it down hard enough that he tips it and spills the rest of it on his bare feet.

“Fuck!” He yells, straining his throat. He holds it, massaging it to make the burn go away, but it’s not like he isn’t used to the feeling.

He groans and cleans up the mess with a dirty wash rag. Usually he doesn’t even have the energy to do *that*. Usually he doesn’t have the energy to do a lot of things.

He moves out of the kitchen and into the hallway half-bathroom. Because his parents are so priss that they need a bathroom just for show, cause no one actually uses this one. The roll of toilet paper sits dormant on the wall. The sink stays there, maybe used three or four times, waiting for the next house guest to awkwardly step in. But his parents don’t have friends because they’re workaholics and Steve doesn’t throw parties anymore. It’s been years.

He used to go into this bathroom just to cry. Before the junkyard, Steve had cried maybe ten times in his whole life. He wishes he could say the same now. It does a lot to a man’s ego to cry every day, because he did after all that shit happened. It took him months to learn how to stop. Part of him didn’t want to, given that crying gave him the only relief from the pain he could find, but it was a little embarrassing when the need would overtake him somewhere like work. In front of someone like Robin.

And then, eventually, the feeling comes back. The tugging in his stomach. Itching at him again, and he just wishes it would go away. The only time it goes away is when he’s sleeping, and most nights he can’t even do that.

Robin says they have something called post traumatic stress disorder. It makes sense to him, because why else would he be so fucked up about this all -- Robin says they can’t help it. They won’t ever be able to help it. They’re just going to have to live the rest of their lives in this endless torture where they both remember what it was like to almost die, whether it be in a Russian base or in a junkyard or in the Byers’ house with his ex girlfriend and her boyfriend.

King Steve also didn't have a fucking mental *disease*.

He doesn't even think the name *Steve* fits him anymore. He doesn't feel like Steve. Steve had short hair, wore polos, he had crushes on people like Tina Robinson in his Chemistry class who was a Jesus freak and wouldn't even touch him before marriage. He was not that kid anymore. He was a man now, with man experiences. He had sex with Nancy. He killed things with a nailed bat, for Christ's sake, he was a *man* now. And that was what he saw in the mirror. A man with a short moustache and five o' clock shadow and long hair and a Grateful Dead t-shirt and sunken eyes.

Maybe he'd just go by Steven from now on.

"Hey, dumbass," Robin said, arms full of boxes from the back storage rooms. "Help me put away the new stock."

Steve finished absent-mindedly flipping through the phone book behind the counter when Robin set all the boxes down.

"Sorry, Buckner,"

"Buck *ley*, dumbass." Robin snipped, stabbing open one box with her knuckles. Steve watched her do it in one go. If she wasn't gay, Steve would still have the biggest crush on her. But he was understanding. He remembers that night, after they puked up their guts and made the drugs go away -- when he told Robin everything he felt. Which was becoming more normal to him. And he remembered the pained look on her face, her eyebrows furrowed and her knees clutched to her chest. He wondered if he had said something wrong. And then she said it. And instead of anger, or sadness, it was just like a little *click* went off in his brain. And it was that easy to get over it.

"Okay, Buckner. Sorry, but no can do." He said, stepping from

outside the counter and onto the sales floor. "My clock out time is," he looked at his watch for dramatic effect, "right now."

"Oh, go to hell. I still have another two hours." She said, rolling her eyes and unpacking the box herself. "Why, you got somewhere to be? A little off the clock work isn't gonna kill you."

"Oh, Robin, but it will." He laughed. He braced his arms on the other side of the counter now, watching her as she put movies on the racks across the stores. "I was planning on going to the Y. Wanted to play some basketball, like the old days, you know?" He was telling the truth. He usually went to the Y, which no one went to anymore, to use their gym for his stress-relieving basketball sessions. It's one of the only ways he's found to let the edge off a little bit.

"Oh, well, alright," She said, disappearing behind a sales rack. "Don't let the door hit you on the way out, Hargrove."

"*Hargrove?*" Steve recoiled at the mention of that name. Billy Hargrove. He hated him. He hasn't seen him since all that shit went down, almost a year ago now.

"You call me Buckner, I call you Hargrove. Suck my dick."

"You play a sick game, Robin. I'll be in tomorrow at ten."

"*Please* let the door hit you on the way out. Call me tonight, dingus."

Steve raised her the middle finger as he walked out of the movie store, the little bell dinging to signal his exit. He climbed into his car, which was sitting patiently across the parking lot. He cranked up the AC and immediately started blasting his music -- all he listened to now was The Beatles. They were his mom's favorite band, and they're one of the only other things that calms him down, nowadays. He remembered the nights that he and Nancy would lay in his bed and hold each other in the middle of the night, when one of them would wake up from night terrors -- whether Nancy dreamt of Barb again or Steve of the monster in Jonathan's living room -- and they would listen to Norweigan Wood, Nancy's favorite song. Steve didn't like it at first, but it grew on him every time he would see Nancy humming

it to herself in class, or in the shower. And eventually, she got him to sing it for her, on some of those late nights. If he felt nice enough.

And then he was in his car again. He knew at home his bed was empty. It's been empty since they broke up, because he hadn't managed to open up to anyone else since then. He missed it.

He let John Lennon's voice fill his car with the sounds of The Word, and as he got into the music, he let his mind drift off from Nancy. He pulled out of the parking lot and onto the main road, fifteen minutes away from his destination, and he hummed along to the music.

It took him ten to get to the Y. He had a habit of going the speed limit and then getting so distracted by the road that he doesn't notice himself going twenty over, then he has to slow down, and the process just repeats itself. He's lucky Jim doesn't pull him over.

Like usual, no one was there. Steve was pretty sure this place had been abandoned after the mall was set up, because that was where all the parents sent their kids for the day. He'd been going here for months now, to take the edge off, to have something overcome his brain that wasn't a near death experience. He liked feeling like he was back in high school again, shooting hoops after school with the team and gossiping like girls about *girls* and test scores and who Tommy boned the night before, even though he was still with Carol.

He walked into the gym and let the smell of old sweat and grime suffocate his senses. It was comforting, in a way, tracing the muscle memory of grabbing a ball from the grate in the corner of the gym, dribbling it a few times on the ground to get his footing, shooting once to see if he was still as good as last week. He was, not to suck his own dick.

Today, he didn't stay long. He usually only spends an hour or so, because he wasn't in the same shape he used to be in -- after he

worked at an ice cream shop for half a year and now a movie store, he doesn't get the same exercise he used to. He can't play for three hours like *King Steve* used to. But he accepts that most good things come to an end.

After around forty minutes he's sweating profusely, panting and bracing himself on his knees as he lets the ball roll away from him. Safe to say he was done for the day. He got that feeling of the runner's high flowing through his body, like he could do anything, so maybe he'd throw in his Stones CD when he got in the car and sing along to Monkey Man like he does when he joyrides in the middle of the night. That's another one of the things he does when he can't sleep, and sometimes even he'll pick up Robin along the way and they'll go drifting on the country roads just outside of Hawkins, just to forget for a little bit. It works, when you risk your life for fun.

He made his way out of the gym with an exhausted stride, his duffel bag full of his sweaty clothes he had changed out of, and his water bottle hanging from his side.

He expected to see only his car in the parking lot. But that was not the case.

About five or six spaces over was a blue, sporty Camaro. He wasn't stupid. He knew that car. Billy wasn't stupid. He should also know what Steve's BMW looks like.

They hadn't talked since Steve's last day of senior year. From his understanding, the guy was still in school, cause he was a year behind him. According to his little sister, after he got flayed and tortured all those *innocent* people and then got the Mind Flayer ripped out of him in the sauna, he stopped being the arrogant, self-absorbed asshole he was known for being -- he shut down, shut up, and stayed in his room all day getting high and jerking off to old Cosmos. Weird for his little sister to know all that, but she also said he wasn't very shameless about how loud he was being when he was crammed in his room all day.

According to some of his younger friends, who were also still in school, when Billy actually *did* show up, he never talked to anybody. He wasn't on the basketball team anymore. Anyone who made eye

contact with him got a resting bitch face or a scowl or just a general flip of the middle finger. He had gotten into double the fights from last year, he went to parties just for the free drugs and booze, and he didn't really even talk to any more girls.

Basically, Billy had been stripped of everything that made him *Billy*.

And either way, Steve still did not want to talk to him. After the major ass whooping he got from him in '84 and he was only saved by a fourteen year old fucking *tranquilizing* him, he thought that was a better sign than any to stay away from the crazy fucker.

But he did wonder if the guy was holding up alright. He must share at least some of the same trauma that he and Robin share. He knows how fucked up it's made them, and obviously Billy isn't doing any better.

He stopped fantasizing about Hargrove when he started walking closer to his car. And he could see into the Camaro and see a body curled over the steering wheel, hands clutching onto it for dear life -- he saw the body shake once, twice, three times -- was he *crying*?

He knew it was Billy. He could see that stupid blonde mullet from miles away. He could almost smell the guy's overpowering cologne, too, that is stuck in his brain because of how *close* they would get during basketball practice, how close they were when Billy was on top of him, battering blow after blow.

He was crying. That was definite in the way he watched him pull up from the steering wheel, rub his eyes and take a deep breath. And then he looked over and saw Steve standing slack-jawed by his car.

"*Shit*," Steve whispered to himself as he turned around, fumbling for his keys to unlock the door. Billy was probably going to try and confront him. He wanted nothing *less* than Billy Hargrove in his face right now. It would probably bring up some shitty memories that he didn't want to relive. He came here to run away from his reality, for God's sake.

He unlocked his door and scrambled in, turning the engine in a split second. He turned his head in Billy's direction, and watched as Billy

was stepping out of his car and making his way towards him.

“Shit, shit, fuck,” He said, pushing on the gas and pulling out of the parking lot as quick as possible. In his rearview mirror, he could see Billy standing in his now-empty parking space, clad in tight jeans and a leather jacket. He looked like he was about to kill someone. It made his stomach turn.

As he entered the main road he thought about putting in the Stones CD he was thinking about -- he didn't want to hassle with trying to get it out while he was driving, though. Instead, he turned on the local radio for the first time in months, just to listen to something to clear his head for a second. Something to get his mind off the twisting in his gut that felt different than the tugging, even though he *still* didn't know what it was.

He was met with the opening riff of Scorpions' *“Rock You Like a Hurricane.”*

Fuck.

2. chapter 2

Summary for the Chapter:

He scoffed and pushed the papers off of the bed, like a pissy toddler, and laid back on his pillows instead. Yeah, maybe it was two in the afternoon, but that was the perfect time for a nap, right? It was his off day, after all, he deserved some special treatment for himself -- he hadn't taken a nap longer than thirty minutes in ages. Maybe he'd actually manage to get some sleep, as he laid his head down on the pillow-

And on cue, the walkie on his dresser across the room started to go haywire.

"Steve! This is Dustin! Code red, I repeat, CODE RED!"

Notes for the Chapter:

some good billy and steve interaction here. i was too impatient to wait a whole week to post this update cause i had to go back and rewrite some stuff (this story has been sitting for like.....a year) also steve truly wanting to become a better person? that's my favorite trope

It had been a week since Steve had his *interaction* with Billy at the Y.

Of course, it was just his luck that the one safe place he had left was now contaminated with the looming threat of running into him again. Part of him didn't want to take any chances; maybe he was better off just asking his old coach for a pair of keys to the school gym, so he could use it after hours. Coach Francis liked him enough for it to work, he thought.

Another part of him, though, itched to see what in the hell he was crying about. Hargrove just never seemed like the type to show any other emotion than anger and lust, so seeing him in such a vulnerable

position, hunched over the steering wheel like that -- it made his stomach do flips and he wasn't sure why. He tried to suppress the heat rising up his neck with the humiliation of just standing in the parking lot and watching his body wrack, but he still felt sweat start to bead at his forehead.

He was sitting on his bed, trying to write the second essay this week, to get into another college a year late. His Dad was going to hound him until he got into at least four, and he wished he could just stop now, because he's already gotten into two. But Mr. Harrington isn't *satisfied* yet. And it seems that everyone in this town *except* Steve knew that Mr. Harrington always got what he wanted.

"You are still in this goddamn house, boy," He says, almost every night that he actually *is* home, which is rare. "I thought I'd be done with you by now" was one of his personal favorites. That one usually stung the most. To think that his own Father was hoping to get rid of him even though, maybe it was normal for kids to leave at 18. Steve knew multiple people who *didn't*, though. Hell, it didn't look like Hargrove was going to be going anywhere when he graduated in a few months.

Steve stared down at his paper as he read over the third paragraph for the twentieth time. Something about his basketball career. He was shitty at basketball, anyway. He was one of the only kids on the team that didn't get a scholarship.

He scoffed and pushed the papers off of the bed, like a pissy toddler, and laid back on his pillows instead. Yeah, maybe it was two in the afternoon, but that was the perfect time for a nap, right? It was his off day, after all, he deserved some special treatment for himself -- he hadn't taken a nap longer than thirty minutes in ages. Maybe he'd actually manage to get some sleep, as he laid his head down on the pillow-

And on cue, the walkie on his dresser across the room started to go haywire.

"Steve! This is Dustin! Code red, I repeat, CODE RED!"

Steve's eyes shot open and immediately he was scrambling over to his dresser. He wasn't ready for this. Not right now, *jesus fuck* not right now. But if his kids were in trouble, then he'd just have to jump into the fire. He grabbed the walkie and his keys right next to it, already bolting out the door.

"What the fuck, what's going on?" He said, trying to sound calm over the speaker. Dustin didn't say anything back. "Hello?! I'm getting into the car right now, where are you?"

"Steve--" Dustin's voice came over the walkie. Finally. He could hear laughing in the background. Who the fuck was laughing during a code red? Code red meant something *bad*, something like the demogorgon, the fucking flesh mind flayer fucker-thing, code red did *not* mean laughing.

"We got you, son of a bitch! Over." Lucas said, coming in.

What the fuck. He was already in the seat of his car, keys in the ignition. For nothing. His heart was racing a hundred miles an hour, for nothing.

"What the hell, shitbirds. Over and out."

"Wait, wait!" Dustin had ahold of the walkie again. "We actually do need you. To give us a ride to the arcade. Over."

Were they being fucking serious? Steve's brain couldn't even think properly right now. They just gave him the biggest fucking scare in his *life*, and they were asking him for a ride to the arcade. "No. Over and *out*." He said, and he was going to shut the damn thing off, but then Dustin started talking *again*.

"Please, Steve, Mike *and* Lucas' bikes are broke. We have no other way to get there. Over."

Steve sat in his car for a moment, hands on the wheel, looking out into his driveway. Why would he go? Why would he show them any shred of decency right now when he's starting to feel that dreaded tugging in his stomach *again*?

"Fine. Who's house am I going to? Over."

“Mike’s! Over.”

“Alright, dipshit. If you’re not ready the moment I pull up, I’m turning around. Over and out.”

He didn’t know why he did it. He had a feeling that if he had gone back inside and sat around, if he continued doing nothing like he already was doing, the feeling in his stomach would just get worse. One of his favorite distractors was driving, anyway. So he pulled out of the parking lot and tried not to speed to his ex-girlfriend’s house.

His ex-girlfriend probably knew he was coming, though. After everything that happened at Starcourt, Dustin and his gang thought it would be best for everyone to get a walkie. Max, El, Steve, Robin, Nancy *and* Jonathan were now all connected to the original party’s channel, getting every notification from the boys trying to talk to each other -- from Max trying to sneak out with Lucas to Mike asking Will for math homework answers. Occasionally, Jonathan and Nancy were heard conversing a few channels over, and their frequency melted into the one that Dustin and Steve shared.

Once he got to the Wheeler’s house, he realized he should have cleared his car.

Steve popped out of the front seat and rested his arms on the roof as he watched the line of kids exit the house. “How many of you am I carting around today?” He said, watching as they poured out one by one.

“All of us.” Dustin said, getting his reserved seat in the front.

“You do know I only have three seats in the back, right?”

“Yeah but, we can fit.”

Steve nodded and got into his own seat. “Hurry up, I don’t have all day. Come on.”

“We’re *trying*, alright --” He heard Mike say.

“Everybody in?”

He turned around and couldn't stifle his laugh. Mike, Lucas, Will and Max were squished into the backseat, El sitting on Max's lap.

"Shut up, you're the one carting around a bunch of teenagers." Lucas said, looking back and forth from Steve and Max. Max was also laughing, apparently, and he nudged her in the side.

"I could kick all of you out of this car, too."

"Shut up, Lucas!" Dustin said. "Steve, come on, we have a deadline to make. There's a competition at the arcade today."

"Okay, okay, we're going. None of you better start making out back there. Not on my nice seats."

Eventually, they moved out of the Wheeler's lawn. He could feel the car being weighed down by all the extra bodies, making them go slower than what was actually showing up on the speedometer -- he was going to have to harass Dustin for gas money.

Steve pressed play on whatever CD was in his car -- the Beatles, still, which he didn't mind. In the rearview mirror, he could see all the reactions of the kids -- Mike scoffing, Will nodding his head to the music (Probably Jonathan had shown him them before, it would make sense, cause it's *exactly* the stuff old Johnny Boy would listen to,) El looking confused, and Max rolling her eyes.

"Why the *Beatles*. I can't stand them anymore." Max said, trying to shimmy away from Lucas, who was playing with the stray strings on her cut-off denim shorts. "It's all Billy listens to now. I can hear it every goddamn day from his room."

Billy Hargrove. Listening to the *Beatles*? That had to be a fever dream.

"Language in this car, please."

"Shit." Mike said, chuckling to himself. Dustin started to snicker.

"How's your brother doing, by the way?" Steve asked, not even sure why. He doesn't care about Billy. He doesn't *really* hate him, but he doesn't like him either. But given the way he was kind of, you know,

sobbing in an abandoned parking lot a week ago, maybe he's a little bit concerned for the guy. It doesn't seem like he talks to anybody about the shit he went through. At least Steve has Dustin, Robin, or Jonathan, sometimes. They had talked before over the walkie.

"He's..." Max trailed off. Steve could see in the rear view her pained expression, eyebrows furrowed and her lips pursed. "He's not doing good, I guess. All he does is sit in his room and play music and smoke. He's at least getting out of the house, now. He started going to the Y."

Yeah. At least he's getting out of the house. Steve looked back to the road, concentrating on the double yellow lines, mind instinctively wandering to the blue Camaro sitting in that empty parking lot.

It's another few days until he works up the courage to go to the Y again. He knew he was spending too much time inside because when he wasn't working on his acceptance essays, he was sitting antsy and bored around his house trying to distract himself. It seemed that no matter how much TV he watched, no matter how many times he called Robin and rambled about his incessant thinking, he always managed to end up back at him and Billy's *incident*.

He kept thinking about him *crying*. What he looked like hunched over the steering wheel, shaking — he'd never seen Billy like that. He didn't think he'd ever see Billy like that. He was this burly tough guy, who acted like he had never cried in his *life*, or had never felt any other emotion than like, sports and sex. If those were feelings.

He felt something like the bad feeling in his stomach when he thought about it, but it was a little bit more burning than tugging. He didn't understand it any more than the other feelings he felt. Sometimes he wished he could go back to the blissful ignorance he had before this shit happened.

He sat in his car in the parking lot of the Y as he stared down Billy's empty Camaro. He must've been inside. Everything in his brain was telling him to *not* go in, to just come back another time and completely avoid the feral animal waiting inside the gym. He would probably end up beaten to a bloody pulp again, because only God knew that even if Steve could fight, he could *not* fight Billy Hargrove. The man was a behemoth, even though he was an inch shorter, but he was bulky and built and sturdy like a truck. He could suplex Steve *easily* and Steve was a little bit scared of that fact.

But everything else in his body felt a little bit bad. Just a little bit. Given Max's feelings towards Billy, he had a good feeling that they didn't talk much. Obviously Billy didn't talk to anybody. Steve had Robin and Dustin and Jonathan and all of the kids to talk to, even though he didn't talk to *them* much, but there were many nights where Steve laid awake because of his night terrors and then his walkie would start going haywire. One of the kids would be on the other side and he would have to talk them down from a panic attack, or soothe them to go back to sleep.

Against every urge in his body, Steve opened his door and started walking to the gym. His legs felt like jelly and he didn't know *why*, but he knew he wasn't going to be playing much basketball. He didn't know *what* he was doing.

He walked up to the door and peered into the skinny glass window.

Billy was in there, alright. He was in the middle of the court, shirt off and glistening a little with sweat. Steve gulped. He kept shooting hoops exactly like he did during basketball practice, just a bit intimidating and with enough skill to beat out a whole team. Steve stood there and teetered on his toes, wringing his hands together —

Why was he so *nervous*?

Maybe because he was terrified of getting a tooth knocked out this time.

He took a deep breath and put his hand on the door handle.

“*Fuck.*”

With a quick push, like ripping a bandaid off, he opened the door. He felt like an idle duckling, waiting to be picked apart by the hawk standing in front of him. But, Billy didn't seem to notice he had fully stepped in, door now closed carefully to keep his arrival a secret.

This gave him enough time to maybe try coming up with a witty one-liner. It would be like the Byers' house all over again, when Dustin applauded him for the use of "Don't cream your pants." He started flipping through phrases in his head like a phone book, shaking his head to himself when he couldn't come up with anything *first encounter* worthy,

"Harrington."

Oh fuck. Oh god oh shit oh fuck. Billy didn't even face him. Did he know he was here the whole time, standing like a lost puppy? *How* had he even fucking known? He was starting to debate this. He could easily turn back around and just *leave*, and Billy would know that he cowered away in his presence, but does he *care*?

"Yeah, don't cream your pants, Hargrove." He decided to try his best to look like he wasn't terrified out of his mind. He put one hand on his hip and the other pulled his duffel bag higher in his shoulder, walking into the court. His heart was beating a mile-a-fucking-minute. He felt like he was going to trip over his own feet and *King Steve* never did that. But Billy, of all people, knew that he was nothing like King Steve anymore.

"Maybe learn a new comeback next time you spy on me." Billy said, throwing his basketball into the grate, and walking to the locker room.

Spy on him?

No. He was *not* fucking *spying* on him. All he wanted to do was come to the court, dribble out the nightmares from last night, sweat away the worries. He was not fucking spying on Billy Hargrove.

He threw his duffel to the side next to the bleachers and ran behind him, no second thought. Maybe it was a little bit creepy, but he didn't care. He had a habit of not caring recently.

“Hargrove,” he said, looking into the locker room, but he didn’t see him. “I’m not fucking— I’m not *spying* on you.” He could have worded that better.

“Then why the fuck did you follow me in here?” He heard Billy say. He still couldn’t see his body. He then heard the drum of the showers being turned on, and Steve felt the heat on his cheeks start to rise. What the *fuck*.

He couldn’t exactly answer the question himself. Why *did* he follow him in here? All he was was just a little bit worried for the guy. Which completely derails what he used to think of him. Don’t get him wrong, he still hated his guts, but he at least had the human decency that everyone else seemed to lack that Billy obviously needed someone to talk to. He was willing to be that person, right?

“Look, dude,” he sighed, leaning up against the wall as he hoped Billy heard him from the showers. “I’m just saying, of all people I know we went through some fucked up shit...” He didn’t know exactly how he wanted to say this. He was just going to have to trust his brain (that didn’t work as well as it used to after he had to chuck fireworks at a flesh-fuck Monster.)

“We both know what I saw last week. Even your sister can tell something’s up with you -- You aren’t like, okay. At all. But that’s okay, really none of us are.”

He was met with silence. He wondered if Billy was even listening. If he wasn’t, then the joke is on him. He could happily keep being a bum that stayed in his room all day and choked and died on cigarettes.

“I want to give you my number, like someone who cares would do. But I’m not fucking forgiving you for that shit you pulled last year. I’m just trying to be nice. We have shared trauma and you need to talk to somebody, Hargrove, or you’re going to go fucking crazy, because I know I am.”

He was met with *more* silence. Jesus, he might as well have been talking to the wall he was leaning on. “Just call my landline. If you need me. I’m always awake. I don’t know about you, but I can’t sleep

after that shit.”

He pushed himself off the wall and left the locker room. The entire time all he could hear was the pattern of water on the tile floor and the echo of his own voice. He didn't know what else he expected from Billy, given the guy was a massive cunt and probably a sociopath. Max told him about all his rage-induced driving habits, and his affinity for making himself angry when he didn't need to be, and *also* had horrible people skills, especially outside of his family. There had to have been something up with him even *before* the possession.

Steve was grabbing his duffel bag from the bleachers when he heard a door open and close behind him. Billy was standing behind the door to the locker rooms, clad in a towel wrapped around his waist and holding on *barely*, just by his hand.

“What's your number.” He said. Not even a question, he just *said* it.

“812-635-5499.”

And then Billy *stared* at him. And he pulled his lips and looked back down to his feet. Without another word he slid back into the locker room and left Steve standing in his wake, too distracted to notice the deep blush that soaked his cheeks. He was still entirely *too* focused on his bare chest and damp hair that fell down his shoulders.

No. His mind flooded with thoughts of the mall again. He refused to think about either, but he would much rather think about that night and the sheer terror than thoughts of Billy Hargrove naked. Quickly, he shook his head and grabbed his duffel bag, sprinting out of the gym, just desperate to get away from it all.

It was midnight. He didn't know if he couldn't sleep because of the

usual reasons or because of his nerves.

He was standing in the kitchen, arms resting on the counter and head resting in his hands. He had been trying to sleep since ten, because he had an early shift tomorrow, but it wasn't working. He wouldn't be surprised if he ended up falling asleep with his head behind the counter, but Robin would cover for him. Every single time.

Every moment he had downtime since *today's* incident at the Y, away from cleaning and acceptance letters and taking Dustin home from AV club, he was shaking his leg, wringing his hands, cracking his knuckles, doing *anything* to keep himself from thinking about the phone ringing. Yet, he kept catching himself staring at the phone. He'd be standing still in the living room, or pacing, waiting for the ring that sounded like it was already going off in his head.

It felt like sophomore year all over again, when he'd give a girl his number and then he would wait for her to call him and then she never would. And Steve would sit there, cursing himself for not just asking for *her* number, and *he* could call her whenever he wanted, instead of waiting for *her*. Billy was probably never going to call.

It was twelve thirty now. Steve felt like he was going to fall asleep standing up if he stayed awake any longer, so he decided it was better to just forget it. Billy wasn't calling. He didn't know why he even tried. He tried to be nice for *one day*, to the guy that punched his lights out, to the guy he shouldn't have shown a single *sliver* of kindness to considering all the things he'd done wrong *outside* of getting possessed by that stupid fucking flesh monster. He would never forget almost dying by his hands in the Byers' house, or the fact that he didn't want Max to see Lucas because he was black -- he was overall a dick a majority of the time -- maybe he could've helped the guy out. If he had actually called.

He pulled himself off the kitchen counter and stretched enough to crack his back, almost making him pass out right there. He trudged up the stairs and into his room, where a phone sat on his dresser. And it seemed the moment he opened his door, it started ringing.

If he answered now and it *was* Billy, he would know that he was up and waiting. Or he could just say that he couldn't sleep, because that

wasn't *not* true. He just wouldn't be telling the whole truth. Or, he's working himself up for nothing, and it's some telemarketer or some shit. But what telemarketer calls at almost one a.m.?

Steve took a deep breath and picked up the phone.

"Hello?" He said, trying his best to sound tired, but he didn't really have to try.

"Did I wake you up?"

It was Billy.

At first, he didn't know how to respond to the question. He thought that if he *did* call, it would be some kind of threat on his life to think that Billy needed his help, or he was going to chew him out for thinking he was stalking him. But Billy's voice was soft. He asked a question like he *cared* about Steve's wellbeing. He sounded exhausted, or maybe like he was about to cry.

After a too-long silence, Steve cleared his throat and said, "No, no, uh... just haven't been able to sleep."

"Neither have I."

Steve let his mouth do the talking. He knew that if he thought too much, he'd say something wrong. "That's understandable. Look, uh, about what I said today, in the gym,"

"That's why I called." He was so *sharp* about it all. Billy seemed collected. Very straightforward. Unlike Steve, who was a very run-on-sentence type of guy.

"Yeah, I figured. Look, I hope you don't think I'm like, intruding, I guess." He sighed and took the phone to his bed, sitting criss cross and holding it in his lap. "Kind of worried about you."

"Steve Harrington? Worried about *me*? " He chuckled on the other end and Steve felt his face burn up.

"Yeah, is that a bad thing?"

“No, no, it isn’t. Just not used to the feeling.”

Steve wasn’t used to *this* feeling. He was hot all over and his palms were sweating, and he felt a lump in his throat like he did in the mall bathrooms with Robin. He didn’t like it. But, once again he realized he was being too quiet.

“Do you...” He trailed off. He didn’t know how he wanted to say it. He was basically trying to be this guy’s therapist, kind of like what Robin did for him. She made it look so easy. “Do you want to talk about it?”

“Talk about what?” Steve could hear the sudden defensiveness in Billy’s tone.

“You’re not an idiot.”

“This town has dumbed me down a bit.”

Steve sighed. “You know what I mean.”

“I really don’t.”

Steve held the phone away from his face for a moment while his face contorted. His playful ignorance was almost sickening, knowing everything he’s been through. He took a deep breath before holding the phone back up to his ear. “Billy, you were flayed. You’re lucky you’re alive.” He paused.

Billy went silent. Immediately Steve assumed he said something wrong.

He kept talking, though, despite knowing better. “I don’t mean to be harsh.”

“You’re sounding like it.”

“Sorry.”

“Keep talking though.”

Steve wanted to scream. He didn’t understand.

“One of the first things me and Robin did after everything... *happened...* we just talked. About it all. For like, three hours. I had to explain everything that had happened over the last three years.”

“Wait, there was other shit before...” Billy stopped. He made a noise on the other line that Steve could barely hear.

And suddenly, things clicked for him. Billy was never informed of the reasons Max was in the Byers house that night — he was never told what the Mind Flayer was — all he knew was that darkness, and unlike Will, nobody had the common decency to try to help him understand what was going on.

Steve took another deep breath before speaking again. “Oh my God, Billy.”

“What? You sound like I just told you my sister died.”

He didn’t understand his composure. A single thought about anything that had happened in the last three years managed to make that feeling in Steve’s stomach burn for hours. How would he explain any of it to someone who had never known? His mind started racing of what happened when Will came back, and what they told him, but he wasn’t really involved much in all of this back then. He was pretty sure the kid got major professional help. And Billy had gotten nothing.

So after another long silence, Steve clutched his hands in his lap as he held the phone with his shoulder. “I guess I’ll say,” he chuckled, trying to make light of the situation, “that we’ve seen stranger shit than this.”

After around an hour of explaining everything that happened up until the night at Starcourt, with moments of Billy intruding to say, “*Max? Maxine was there? My fucking sister? You’re kidding me,*” there was another long silence that felt painfully agonizing.

“You O.D. on me, Hargrove?” Steve sighed, trying not to fixate on the images flowing through his head of the Mind Flayer screaming blood and guts onto his face.

He heard a deep breath. "No. I'm here."

"Making sure."

"I didn't know."

"Well, that's why I just told you."

Billy laughed just loud enough that he can hear. "I don't know if it's going to help my nightmares."

"I have those, too. Like I said, if you want to talk about them. I'm here."

"Maybe sometime else."

Steve felt the back of his neck and his face get hot. "Yeah." He can't manage to say anything else.

"I have school." Billy said.

"Oh, yeah. You're still a senior."

"Yeah."

"Yeah..." Steve trailed off. He thought that they could both tell it was getting painfully awkward, as his embarrassment started to ebb.

"I'll talk to you tomorrow. If that's okay." Billy said. Steve took a deep breath as the heat came rushing back through his with an entirely different feeling.

"Y-Yeah. I'm off work at five."

"I'm out of school at 2:15."

"I know."

"Yeah. I know you know. Night."

And before he could say goodnight, the call ended. He placed the phone onto the receiver and back onto the dresser across his room.

Max was right. Billy didn't act like Billy. Usually he was crass and rude and self-absorbed and a general nuisance to talk to, but this time he seemed different. Awkward. Generally a little calmer than usual. *Not* like Billy.

Steve didn't mind talking to this new Billy. Judging by their conversation, he could actually talk to him without getting annoyed or pissed after a minute. If anything he was equally as awkward. Which, he guessed, was normal when they were talking about something as heavy as trauma, especially with a guy who was so little educated on what was happening inside his brain as Billy Hargrove. Not saying he knew much more, though.

But there was something in him that itched.

He shut the lights off in his room, ready to try and set a record this time. If he took three melatonin and a shot of Nyquil, maybe he could get four hours in. He buried himself under the sheets.

For the first night in a long time, his mind drifted to something other than the junkyard, or Starcourt, or the Byers' house. He had to open his eyes to make sure he wasn't dreaming when it was all *Billy* when they were closed. How he was hunched over the steering wheel of his car, him standing behind the locker door with just the towel on, droplets of water still stuck to his skin. His voice and how it sounded different over the phone.

Steve shoved his head into the pillow.

Maybe tonight wasn't his night.

Notes for the Chapter:

this story isn't finished so if you have things you'd maybe like to see in this fic or headcanons you think would fit pls comment and tell me <333333 i love hcs and want to hear all of them

n of course lmk if you want to see more of this fic !!!

Author's Note:

comment if u want to see more!!!! also dw for my billy fans u will get ur content in next weeks update. i just love writing billy so that's why i've been wanting to come back to this LMAO

also steve my beloved. robin my beloved. i love their friendship so much because i am steve irl and my best friend is robin irl